

The Seventh Finale

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The Seventh Finale

I wrote this before Lungbarrow was published, and have now decided to post this for your torture ... er, your entertainment.

THE SEVENTH FINALE by Adrian Tullberg

The Doctor was, indeed, getting old.

Old, that is, in this particular incarnation. Wear and tear caused by the bumping, prodding, abusing and perusing by countless attacks made on him by humans, and aliens alike. Of course, there was the passage of time itself. Time kept on wearing away at him, nibbling away at his many lives, no matter how many times he cheated death. He evaded Time's grasp every time he stepped into the TARDIS, but unfortunately, he willingly stepped into it's clutches every time he stepped out into the 'real' world.

Yes, he was, indeed, getting old, he mused, as he polished the wooden control console - recently installed. When Chris had left, taking Wosley with him - when exactly, he didn't know, signs of old age again - he had decided to renovate. He tapped out a series of commands on the Architectural Reconfiguration Programme, and expanded the control room. Got rid of the perpetual white that the TARDIS seemed to insist on placing everywhere. Now there was a permanent oak and wood motif throughout the whole TARDIS. He decided to expand the whole control room's size, and started placing some of his personal items that he had cherished for centuries around the place. His old record player. Some of his favourite books - just a personal three thousand volumes, the majority were relegated to the dusty library. The old equipment lockers were thrown out, replaced with oak drawers.

A few plants, his favourite armchair. The scanner had been damaged in the massive renovations, so he had popped back to the house at Allen

Road, and removed the Bakelite Television from his mainframe - Ace had bought a Sony 60-inch colour monitor for his computer network, complaining that the black-and-white gave her a headache whenever she watched it, but he never got around to replacing it. He used Ace's Sony to replace the Bakelite, the 1947 monitor now integrated into the scanner's sensor network.

Ace...always preying somewhere in his memories, mental minefields of Nitro-Nine ready to explode in his reminding. At least she was safe in France now, with Jason's clone. The Doctor suddenly had a thought - make his own clone of Ace, at eighteen, copy her memories held in the TARDIS telepathic circuits. Engineer the clone's body to remain permanently in the late teens, with a lifespan of at least two hundred years. By then his seventh body should have worn out - and if this Ace wouldn't grow up, maybe she could always trust him....?

The Doctor dismissed the idea. He drove out Ace the first time, acting the Ka Faraq Gatri. She left him a second time because she had changed from her experiences with him. Age, and experience changed. He changed.

The Doctor had set no particular destination, no current course..... let the TARDIS decide, stop being the Grand Manipulator. He settled back in his armchair, and looked at his book collection. What to read, what to re-read? Decisions, decisions.....

Suddenly, a chime emanated from the console - an indicator that someone was trying to access the Communications network. The Doctor leaped from his chair, and opened a channel. The Bakelite flickered into life, and a terse message scrolled down the screen.

DOCTOR -

- REQUIRE URGENT ASSISTANCE. THE MASTER INVOLVED.

GO TO CAPITOL, TIMEFRAME 5275.5

THE HIGH COUNCIL.

The Doctor's eyebrows flew up in surprise - the High Council asking for his help on an open channel? The potential for political damage was extremely high, any casual operator of a Tachyon scanner could pick that up. The Doctor quickly assessed the situation as he operated the control console, and could only assume that the High Council were so terrified of a particular situation that they didn't care who knew - and for venal backstabbing bureaucrats that consisted of the Council - the situation must be grave indeed.

The Master as well. Must have done something extremely nasty this time.

The TARDIS materialised into life, smack in the middle of the High Council Chambers. The Doctor's head popped out of the doors, looking for the Chancellery Guard that always popped up whenever he arrived back home. There they were, marching - at double time - in two rows, towards him. He stepped out of the TARDIS, prepared to give both barrels of the authority-ridden monologue that stopped these ceremonial showpieces in their tracks. They marched towards the TARDIS, and stopped, one line on each side of the doorway, forming an

honour guard.

Their Commander, in plumed helmet, saluted The Doctor. "On behalf of the High Council, you are officially welcomed back to Gallifrey. The Lord President requires your presence - immediately."

The Doctor raised his left eyebrow - he saw an Earth actor doing that once, and he had spent ages trying to perfect the movement, and now was a prize opportunity to exercise the effect of utter superiority it emanated.

"Immediately? Does the Lord President have no sense of propriety?"

"This is an emergency situation, Lord Regent."

Lord Regent - the official title of an ex-President. More of a ceremonial honour than any actual authority - just like 97% of the total official postings on Gallifrey. For the High Council to use shameless - but merited - flattery on him....

"Very well! Lead the way!" The Doctor jogged off, knees raised high. The Commander quickly gave the signal for the rest of the Honour Guard to quickly march after him. They managed to draw level with the Doctor, who kept on quick stepping in military fashion to the President's offices.

The Doctor and honour guard quickly moved through the corridors of the Capitol, gaining a few unusual stares as they double-timed it to the inner sanctums of the Government section. They came to a halt outside the President's office, but the Doctor kept on running on the spot, the Chancellery Guard in perfect time with him.

The Commander took an insane risk with his career prospects. "Lord Regent - can we stop now?"

The Doctor, keeping his head perfectly level as he jogged on the spot, gave the Commander a curious look. "What - stop this terribly bracing exercise?" He appeared to consider the question as he continued his stationary jogging. "Well, all right - just because I like your face." The Doctor stopped, and the Guard stopped, chests heaving - guard work on Gallifrey wasn't meant to involve exercise.

The Doctor gave a pointed look at the Commander. "Aren't you going to announce me?" The Commander knocked cautiously on the door, something was murmured to him. The Commander opened the door wide open. "My Lord President - The Doctor; Lord Regent."

The Doctor walked into the President's offices as imperiously as possible - if the High Council needed his help this badly he was going to enjoy it as much as possible. Then he saw the scene - and his jaw dropped. He saw a man with greying hair in the Presidential robes - Romana must have resigned the position - and the usual faceless delegation of Inner Council members.

Mingling among the Council were five Imperial Daleks.

The Doctor quickly fished in his pockets, grabbing his sonic screwdriver. If he could fire an electromagnetic Pulse on a low

kilohertz frequency, he could herd the Council members towards his TARDIS and find the support fleet that was logically somewhere near Gallifrey's twin moons....

The President raised his hands. "Doctor! The Daleks have been invited to the Capitol under diplomatic treaty!"

The Doctor slowly raised his hands out of his pockets, still clutching his sonic screwdriver. "Are you quite sure, Lord President?"

"We are here at the High Council's request, Doc-Tor."

The Doctor's head began to swim. He clutched in his pocket, pulling out his packet of jelly babies. He picked one at random, placing it in his mouth with numbing fingers - and then spat it out. It was a black one - he hated them, but they always managed to materialise in his supply with the inevitability of a dozen Fortean Flickers.

The taste galvanised him into action. "May I ask why you have invited such a drastic action, my Lord President?"

The President clasped his hands together, wringing them until the knuckles turned white. "A....situation has arisen, Doctor, that requires a military alliance with the Imperial Dalek Forces."

The Doctor nodded, slowly. "Which is....?"

The President retrieved a miniature holo-projector from his robes, and pressed a control. Instantly, a green sphere representing a world flared up forty centimetres from the floor.

"We have learned that a mercenary group of Chelonians have been commissioned to attack the Crab Nebula - the site of the Great Experiment. They have been given primitive time-jump equipment to leap back to the time before Omega activated his Hand, providing the power for our initial temporal travels."

The Doctor watched as a group of several miniature red battle craft hovered in orbit around the soon to be annihilated star. "I see....The Master hired them, I presume?"

"All evidence points to that conclusion, Doctor. He assume that he wishes to deprive the Time Lords anything approaching time travel technology."

The Doctor gave a cursory look at the nearest Dalek - white and gold, eye-stalk pointed firmly at the hologram. "What do the Daleks have to do with this?"

"The Chelonian battle fleet have been given an extremely powerful but primitive temporal capacity. They have the temporal range - but virtually no spatial jump capacity. Intelligence reports indicate that he intends to travel via hyperspace to a certain system, make a massive jump backwards - and the Universe's own movement through space itself will ensure that the mercenary fleet will arrive at the correct spacial and temporal location."

The Doctor's fingers strummed the handle of his umbrella. "And that system would have to be.....?"

He tried to work out the problem with a variation of the numbingly intricate calculations for Universal Spacial Drift that were required for short hops in the TARDIS, but the Dalek answered the question.

"Skaro. The Master intends to invade our system. He will fail. He will be crushed. All will fall before the might...."

The Doctor waved his hat in front of the Dalek's eyestalk. "We know, we know...all powerful, all destructive, ra ra rah. So the High Council is forming a military alliance with The Daleks?"

The President nodded, imperiously. "Precisely, Doctor. We intend to form a powerful warfleet, to defeat the Chelonian battlefleet - all reports indicate that they have received a massive upgrade in weapons and shield weaponry - the maximum extent we are unsure of. Both the forces of Gallifrey and Skaro will form a barricade near the outer rim of Skaro's system, where the mercenaries will have to emerge from hyperspace. Tactical planners from both sides agree that the combined might of both Dalek and Time Lord Empires will have the best chance of defeating The Master's forces."

The Doctor smiled, and asked the twenty-quid question. "Where do I come into this?"

"You will co-ordinate the liaison between the Dalek and Gallifreyian battle forces. The Daleks specifically requested your presence."

The Doctor's grip on his umbrella tightened. "On what grounds?"

"You have defeated us. You have delayed our conquest of the Universe. No other Time Lord can think and act like you, Doc-Tor. You will be a valuable asset on the front."

The Doctor was about to shout 'no', and run back to his TARDIS as quickly as possible, when the President beckoned him over. The Doctor quickly moved over to the robed figure, who led him to an alcove which was lined with the most advanced anti-surveillance equipment in existence.

"Doctor...I know these monstrosities would love to exterminate you on sight, but they're intelligent enough to realise that someone like you assisting them on a matter as important as this is more logical than a petty vendetta."

"Lord President...Daleks do not honour their military treaties. They use them as a pretext to coax their enemies out of a defensive situation, and then destroy them. I've personally seen it before."

"They have to agree - nobody knows how powerful these mercenaries are. The only way to ensure their defeat, to make sure that the Empires of both Skaro and Gallifrey remain intact is through a rigid military alliance." The President tried a different tract. "Doctor - The Daleks fear you, this incarnation more than ever. They're as nervous as you are..."

"I'm not nervous...just wary." The Doctor snapped.

The President continued. "...And we have to make sure that we send the message through to them that the Time Lords are watching them. That's why we contacted you now rather than a previous or later incarnation."

The Doctor nodded, slowly, and walked out of the alcove. The High Council members and Daleks were watching him, expectantly. The Doctor walked up to the Dalek Commander, and looked it straight in the eye-stalk.

"I don't like this, you know."

"You should - you will - be exterminated."

"But for the sake of Time itself....."

"For the Dalek Empire....."

The Doctor reached out, and solemnly shook the Dalek's plunger-like manipulator arm.

The Doctor walked down the corridor's of the Capitol, the Dalek Commander gliding alongside him. The Doctor would travel to J'k Haran - Bringer of Blood - the outermost planet in Skaro's system in the TARDIS, the Dalek Commander coming with him. At least in the TARDIS he knew that the Dalek could barely touch him, with the state of temporal grace inside. He still had the feeling of ants crawling under his skin, at the prospect of a Dalek entering the TARDIS.

He stopped, suddenly, and looked at the Dalek. "Do you have a name?"

"Names are not logical, or relevant, for a Dalek."

"They are to me. I'll call you ...Fred."

With that, The Doctor set off towards the TARDIS, with the single-minded velocity of a rocket. Fred followed, eye-stalk twitching.

The Doctor entered the TARDIS, Fred following. The Doctor watched as the Dalek slowly surveyed the interior, the tell-tale itching at the back of his celledrum indicating that the Dalek was running a full sensor sweep of the interior. The Doctor made a mental note to send a virus through Fred's memory banks after this little arrangement was over.

"It's bigger on the inside than it is on the outside, you know."

"I am aware of this fact. Sensor Data indicates a trans-dimensional shift."

As Fred used his gravimetric engine to go down the stairs, the Doctor operated the controls, setting the co-ordinates to J'k Haran. As he operated the final dematerialisation sequence, a thought struck the Doctor.

"Fred - do you know that the hire and equipping of Chelonian

battleships and appropriate crew is totally unnecessary for a disruption of the Great Experiment?"

"The Time Lords would not reveal historical data on The 'Great Experiment'. They stated that data on that section of history was inconclusive - sensor scans indicated that they were truthful in their statements."

The Doctor nodded. "Yes.... Time Lords may have a completely detailed history on every planet in this Universe - but know very little before the Rassilon Era."

"That is illogical. Daleks have total records on past and present. For Time Lords to possess such inconclusive records is beyond computation."

The Doctor tensed up. Not illogical for Rassilon. The Time Lords are forbidden to travel into Gallifrey's past by the earliest precepts laid down by Rassilon's days. The Continuity Systems inside every TARDIS make sure that you arrive on Gallifrey in the relative future from when your departure point, be it a day or a millennium. Wily old bird - it makes perfect sense for somebody like him to forbid his time-travelling descendants from interfering with his work, and then erasing all historical records and evidence to prevent those - like me - who consider the Laws of Gallifrey just a hurdle that can be easily stepped over.

"Humanoids are rarely logical - even Time Lords."

"Agreed."

The Chelonian battlefleet surged through hyperspace. The Master had plucked these warriors from the time when their Empire was falling apart from superior enemies and self-conflict. He had given the power - abet primitive - of Time Travel, and promised the technologies that would surpass their enemies, giving the Chelonians the power to eradicate all parasites. It burned the Chelonian's pride to fight for somebody who was technically a parasite - but if they fought through the Dalek defence systems, activated the pre-programmed time-jump equipment, and then defeated the ships that carried Omega and Rassilon to what would be the Crab Nebula, and jump back - then the Chelonian empire would be reborn.

At least, that was the plan.

"It doesn't make sense."

"Specify what does not make sense."

The Doctor was sitting in his favourite armchair, twitching his fingers. He wanted to put on one of his records, he had dragged out an old turntable and a dusty set of 33 1/3rds from deep within the bowels of the TARDIS storage vaults - but there was no way he could relax with a Dalek sitting in front of him. He could never listen to that track ever again without being reminded of white gliding pepperpots.

He looked at Fred, a strange smile on his face. "Just that the Master would go to all the trouble of hiring and equipping a mercenary force in order to disrupt the Great Experiment. He could just alter his

TARDIS into the form of a battlecruiser and wipe out Omega's shuttlecraft."

"What is your supposition, Doc-Tor?"

"That The Master wants to distract both the Daleks and the Time Lords. Make them place all their battlefleets far enough from.... wherever he wants to operate from."

"For what purpose?"

The Doctor looked testily at Fred. "I don't know! Don't you find it highly unlikely that a Chelonian battlefleet - no matter how well modified they are - could break past a combined Time Lord /Dalek military blockade? Those terrapin cyborgs are versatile - but they couldn't break a Dalek barricade, let alone one consisting of your entire battlefleet, plus Time Lord resources."

Fred shifted, his gun-stalk twitching - Dalek body language indicating intense concentration.

"Battle Computers indicate that known technological and tactical level of Chelonian species incapable of defeating Dalek Battlefleet. However, unknown factor of The Master's modifications makes any assessment inaccurate. Potential damage to Skaro itself unknown - homeworld must be defended at all costs."

The Doctor nodded, grimly. The Daleks were galvanised in one direction with any threat to Skaro itself. The Time Lords were predictably guided to the same place by a threat to their monopoly over Time and Space Control. This was obviously a massive destruction on a galactic scale - but to what ends, The Doctor had no idea.

"Fred - for the sake of entertaining all possible outcomes in this battle, we will presume that the Master has employed and equipped a full Chelonian battlefleet for the sake of a distraction - you are capable of dealing with hypothetical situations, aren't you?"

"Yes - simulation sub-routines are standard in all Dalek models - proposed situation of distraction activated and engaged."

The massive fleet rendezvoused three hundred thousand kilometres from J'k Haran. The majority of ships belonged to the Dalek Battle Fleet - over five hundred thousand battle ships, each over three kilometres long. They all formed a massive wall - ten ships 'high', four ships 'deep', with a 'length' of over twelve thousand five hundred ships - a massive barrier covering over three million kilometres.

The Time Lord fleet materialised nearby - only about five thousand ships, but performing a vital role - every one of the Temporal Cruisers were modified to transmit via Tachyon net, incredible amount of power directly from the Eye of Harmony, into the Dalek battleships.

This gave the Dalek Commanders the tactical advantage of Unlimited Energy resources. Ratios for power conservation were thrown out the window, as each of the fleet were prepared to spew out a massive amount of energy only limited on how fast the servo-motors could cool the weaponry.

This unprecedented military spectacle sat, and waited. Time Lord scans showed that the Chelonians were close now.

Everybody waited impatiently.

The Doctor was pacing around the control console while Fred was finishing his computations.

"All possible scenarios calculated - all possible outcomes reveal that distracting Dalek and Time Lord Battle fleets to one place and time would reveal window of opportunity on Gallifrey since Skaro still maintains skeleton security force and that Chancellery Guard are only personnel qualified to operate Time Lord Power Cruisers. Gallifrey has no physical enforcement of security."

"That seems reasonable - he could impersonate a Senior Time Lord, in fact, we both did once to get to the TARDIS docking bays. It's a little harder to impersonate a Black Dalek. But why, for what purpose? What could he need to get rid of every security officer on Gallifrey? He's never needed to do that before. Lord knows, it's in every renegade's code of practice to make them look like incompetent idiots."

"Logical conclusion - he intends to take over Gallifrey from within the Capitol."

The Doctor looked pointedly at Fred, then leapt to the console, and frantically re-set the co-ordinates. "If that's the case, he's already on the planet, with his goons in place."

The Time Lord/Dalek Battlefleet saw the Chelonian battlefleet burst out of hyperspace five seconds early, and six kilometres off their calculated course - The Master had outfitted the homicidal terrapins with dimensional scan scramblers. While the Daleks hurriedly re-set their targeting vectors, the Chelonians opened up with everything they had at every target within range. Several Dalek cruisers buckled and withered under the assault, fifteen exploding.

By then, the Time Lords had scanned fifteen seconds into the future, and fed the predicted data into the Dalek's battle computers. The Daleks took this information, plotted, set, and fired. Raw destructive energy pumped out of ugly mechanical nozzles and into the Chelonian cruisers. Three of their craft broke up and exploded before their shields re-calibrated to the plasma energy frequencies, venting away the firepower harmlessly into space.

The Daleks had one strategy for all it's space-borne battles - pump the firepower into your enemy until they break. They hadn't needed a more subtle strategy because that particular tactic had a high success rate. So they employed it - nearly three thousand ships fired a concentrated blast that could vaporise a planet, the Time Lords meeting the total power needs, not even a millionth of a percentile fraction of their possible total power output.

The Chelonians employed a device given to them by the Master - a modified gravitonic generator. The generator warped space/time for a billionth of a second to the extent that a trans-dimensional rift opened, swallowing all the massive infusion of energy. The rift re-opened two seconds later - re-directing all the energy back at the

Dalek battle ships. The Time Lords detected the rift tactic, and hurriedly informed their allies - but too late, as the terrific backwash of energy spread out and incinerated two thousand Dalek ships.

The Daleks consulted their battle computers, the Time Lords their historical records. The Chelonians hauled shell and instantly flew through the hole in the Dalek blockade, and headed for Skaro. The massive blockade started to turn around and give pursuit, hoping against hope that they could catch these tortoises and fry them in their shells before all their realities were destroyed.

The Doctor re-materialised in the High Council Chambers, and ran out into the near empty corridors. As per the dictates of war laid down by Rassilon, each warship must be headed by a Time Lord. And every Gallifreyian warship was out there defending the most genocidal race in the Universe. Not many Time Lords were left here.

Fred was gliding behind him - the Doctor was surprised that he actually missed a Dalek shouting exterminate every time one chased him. They raced to the Presidential suite, and Fred rammed open the doors. The Doctor followed up - their aim was to find the one Senior Time Lord left in charge, and persuade that person to let them contact the Black Dalek and the President.

The Doctor saw the CIA Chancellor, Director of Intelligence, his back turned to him. The Doctor opened his mouth - when he saw the rest of the room.

A stone Ionic pillar. A door had opened on it, and several large terrapins were walking out of it. The Director turned his head, and smiled at the Doctor.

"Well, well. Always on my heels as ever, Doctor."

Fred didn't take the time to appreciate that the Master had disguised himself, and remote-commanded his TARDIS to materialise in the Presidential suite the split second the transduction barriers went down to accommodate the massive Time Lord fleet - he just did what he did best.

"EXTERMINATE!" Fred roared, frying the nearest Chelonian with a quick blast, and shot another walking turtle, just in case everybody in the room had missed the first one's destruction. Every other Chelonian turned their side-arms to the Dalek, and fired, in one smooth rehearsed movement.

Normally, Fred would have ignored normal blaster fire, and would merrily continue exterminating every Chelonian in the room. Unfortunately, The Master had given the Chelonian microwave blasters. Fred, snug within the cradle of his survival chamber, found his brains suddenly leaking from his vestigial orifices, cooked from the inside out. The Dalek suddenly went still, smoke issuing from the grill on its top half. A hybrid smell of roast turkey and burnt rubber suddenly filled the room.

The Doctor took off his hat with his right hand, and covered his mouth with his hanky with his left. Sic Gloria Transit, Fred Dalek Stubborn, arrogant, homicidal, went down fighting. A model of his species.

The Master looked at the Doctor, seeming to steel himself for some great physical effort. Suddenly, his body started to glow, and his features began to warp and change into the familiar dark bearded looks.

The Earth male has a tendency to empathically feel the possible pain inflicted against another of it's species. The best example of this is the wounded expression they make when they see a male gymnast perform a quadruple somersault - and land in the splits. The Doctor's face took on a similar expression just then - purposely forcing a regeneration for disguise purposes was painful enough to watch, but doing it again just so that you would look the way you did earlier....?

The Master turned around - and The Doctor recoiled in surprise. The Master's features were roughly the same as he recalled from Bernice's wedding - but his eyes were now green slits, giving his gaze a reptilian cast.

"I had no idea you had a thing for body bepples."

The Master snarled. "Hardly, Doctor. This - change - is a vital nesscessity."

The Doctor suddenly grasped the point. "The Tzuns didn't quite get it right, did they? They managed to duplicate most of the Time Lord genome, but you placed your new body under stress by accelerating your regenerative processes - and your body started to decay again. You managed to avoid the degenerative state you were in earlier by placing reptilian DNA sequences where the Tzun genetic engineering hadn't quite worked."

"You should have become Castellán with a reasoning process like that."

The Doctor shrugged, absently. "It's fun for a while, ordering the Chancellery guard around - but three weeks later, you're swamped with all those forms." He shuddered involuntarily. "I had a nightmare where I was crushed to death by a mountain of paperwork in a Driver's Licensing Office. It's more scary than it sounds..."

"Be quiet!" Roared the Master, his new green eyes narrowing into slits. "I will have it all - new life, and complete power over the Daleks and the Time Lords!"

The Doctor smiled again. "You couldn't do it. You've engineered a massive threat to both the Daleks and The High Council, but all you've done is unite them in the face of a mutual threat."

The Master nodded, graciously. "Yes, untied them, strengthened their ties - placed all their eggs in one enormous basket."

The Doctor frowned. "Quite a powerful and destructive basket."

"One fuelled by unlimited power from the Eye of Harmony."

Then - the Doctor realised. "You're going to overload the Eye - and wipe out both fleets in one go."

"Yes - interesting, isn't it? The universe's most powerful trans-temporal empire, all dependant on one omni-present, omni-temporal power source - a black hole held in check by a miracle in force-field engineering. It would be child's play to re-align the fields... overload the Time Lord's energy-cruisers, crewed by the High Council, and the majority of the Dalek Battlefleet in one stroke...then take over what's left."

"Yes, with the remaining Chelonian fleet which was unaccounted for after that little incident at Zamper - then use the McCarty technique to eliminate your employees, am I correct?"

The Master shrugged. "It depends on how much resistance there are on both worlds. With control of both the technology of Gallifrey and the manufacturing capacity of the Dalek military factories - the rest of the Universe won't be too much of a chore now, will it? Then.... with the amount of young Time Lords still in the Academy..... immortality closely approaches....."

The Doctor shivered, involuntarily. "I still can't believe that you still try to hijack other people's bodies. It's reprehensible."

The Master looked pointedly at The Doctor. "Perhaps if I took your body you wouldn't worry so much about the morality of the situation...? Perhaps not..... after all, you're more than half way through your life cycle. And that incarnation's about to give up the ghost. Better a fresh young life cycle, that's yet to experience the pangs of regeneration."

The Doctor snarled. "You accelerated your own regenerations on purpose, you realise - you should bear the consequences."

The Master suddenly rounded on him. "It was you who forced me to accelerate my life cycle! How I managed to escape from the Time Lords, from the prison that you put me in? How did you think I managed to escape from the worldwide searches while I set up my identity as Emil Keller? From the site of the Thunderbolt gas missile on Earth, past those UNIT idiots? How I escaped from the Earth and Draconian patrols on the Ogron Homeworld? You forced me to accelerate my regenerations, not me! I wasted all my lives because of you!"

"You didn't have to keep returning to your old form constantly - you can't blame me for your own damned vanity!"

The Master looked at The Doctor with barely repressed anger, and motioned to two of the Chelonians. "Get him out of here, lock him in some room while I access the Eye of Harmony! I want the personal pleasure of making the Doctor beg for death!"

The Chelonians grabbed the Doctor, and prepared to march him out of the room. The Master quickly held up his hand. "Wait a moment!" The Chelonians halted, as the Master approached the Doctor, and fished around in his pockets until he produced the TARDIS key. "Just in case you manage to escape."

The Master waved the Chelonians away as he removed his Time Lord robes, revealing his customary black tunic underneath. He would, at his leisure, make the Doctor suffer.

But first - he had a world to conquer.

The Doctor was silent, while the Chelonians were looking for a room with one entrance and a secure enough lock. Since Time Lords like to entertain a lot of people, and have guards for those times when privacy is a must - these tortoises were still looking.

Suddenly, the Doctor quickly wriggled out of their grip. "Stop me if you've seen this trick before, gentlemen."

The Chelonians raised their guns, surely and with purpose. The Doctor raised his hands until his palms were facing his captors.

"Unlike other cheap illusionists, I will admit to having something up my sleeve!" Suddenly, he pointed his hands towards the Chelonians, and a stream of white and red projectiles spewed out from his sleeves. The Chelonians raised their guns to cover their faces from the unexpected attack - and the Doctor quickly ran past them down the corridor, towards his TARDIS.

The Chelonians instantly gave chase. The projectiles were left ignored on the floor, simply being sequential red and black symbols printed on white rectangular paste board.

Earth playing cards.

The Doctor was running to the TARDIS, thinking. The Master would be accessing the Eye of Harmony by now, the same way he did an eternity ago - this time not to prolong his life, but to lay waste to the most incredible battle fleet in the universe that was currently busy trying to fight renegade cyborg turtles. A microwave blast warmed his ear as he pelted towards the familiar box shape. The Doctor turned, to see the Master leading his pack of Chelonians, an amused grin on his face. The Doctor couldn't get into his TARDIS, so why was he bothering?

The Master saw the Doctor half leap, half scuttle up the side of the TARDIS door, scrabbling around the POLICE PUBLIC CALL BOX sign, near the left. The Doctor triumphantly produced something small and shiny from a concealed recess - another TARDIS key! The Master quickly motioned to his Chelonians to hurry the pace - but the Doctor had already unlocked, entered, and closed the TARDIS door.

The Master snarled, as he assessed the situation. The Doctor would be trying to contact the Time Lords, but he had a Tachyon scrambler field to break through, which the Master had placed around the Capitol in case of this little eventuality. The renegade Time Lord motioned to his mercenaries to follow him to the Panopticon.

The Doctor was insanely grinning, as he worked the control console like a virtuoso. The Master never considered his TARDIS a home - so why would he expect a hidden spare key on an old Police Box? Still, since the Master saw the hiding place, he would have to change it - later, when he had the time.

The only way to stop the Master from critically overloading the Time Lord/Dalek battle fleet, was to bleed off the excess energy produced. The only hitch was that the TARDIS's link to the Eye of Harmony was insufficient, so he would have to modify the energy connection.

His hands flew over the controls to the Architectural Configuration System. The best place to put a trans-dimensional link of the size he was contemplating was in the Cloister Room - nothing too important there.

In the dark, cool recesses of the Cloister room, the floor was beginning to shake. Immediately, a stone structure rose out of the floor like a miniature mountain. A ramp rose slowly around it, while four rods flanked the stone sphere that was slowly gaining shape - a granite eye.

The Doctor looked over the readouts, and gave a satisfied nod. This link was a virtual next-door connection to the Eye itself - in fact, you could say that in his Cloisters, he had the Eye. Impossible for any other TARDIS to maintain such a link, being standardised for millenia and everything - but a Type Forty was always the most versatile model of Time Capsule ever designed.

He quickly looked up to check the chronotronic flow - and performed a classic double take, looking around the whole console room. The Seal of Rassilon had emerged on the wall, just above the main doors. He saw the blessed symbol present everywhere in the room!. The Doctor ran a quick check of the Architectural Configuration Systems - and found that the massive modifications made to the TARDIS with the Eye of Harmony had created a bug within the Interior Service Routines. He quickly relegated the problem as to do later realising that Gallifrey's conquest rated a higher priority - not much, but still higher.

The Doctor frenziedly set the controls to start travelling backwards in time, on maximum power. Going backwards against the normal flow of time would consume the most energy.

The colossal battle fleet had pulled out their metaphorical fingers, and were pursuing the Chelonian force. The turtles had managed to make it to the outer moons of Skaro, and were trying to punch a hole through the one thousand and twenty quadrillion terrawatt forcefield lattices that were there on permanent standby. The combined fleet drew up to the now immobile Chelonian force, and opened up.

The Chelonians attempted the warp trick again - but the Daleks had managed to recalibrate the temporal signature of the energy wavelengths, tearing through the warp, and hitting the forcefields of the enemy craft. The Time Lords opened up their links, and allowed the Daleks to saturate their power condensers, swamping their ships with incredible energy levels.

Just as the Master planned.

The Master crouched over the section of the Panopticon floor that housed the monolith of the eye. He was now wearing the scarlet and red robes that his Chapter wore in the Old Times - when his family had reigning power. Before Rassilon's coup - the instillation of the Prydrionians; Rassilon's relatives and in-laws, and being given the reins of power, with enough genetically engineered guile and cunning to stay in power.

The Master had realised early in his life that he was probably the only member of his Chapter who still possessed anything akin to innovation. Naturally, he had gravitated to the only student in the

Academy who had original thought; the infamous Theta Sigma. The soon-to-be Doctor had led rallies, political protests, a well placed Cousin of the most highly ranked families in the Prydrans; and finally left the planet.

The young student who followed in that leader's shadow burned with ambition - to be as much a leader as Theta himself. If not on Gallifrey, where he was destined by birthright to rule, then somewhere else - and finally return to take what was his by right. Three years to the day when Theta left, that young student had forged Presidential documents that got his hands on the most advanced model TARDIS available, and left.

His first dabblings in conquest - small test cases, a civil war here, a nuclear holocaust there - proved enormously successful, and incredibly amusing. Then Theta showed up, now calling himself The Doctor, and under the thumb of the High Council. The Master had offered the hand of partnership, knowing in his hearts that they would have the Universe - and Gallifrey, for what was the universe but the Time Lord's domain?

The Doctor refused, eliminated his scheme, and left him for the Time Lords to find. The Master escaped, and set out on a single minded pursuit of attempted conquest and revenge that the whole universe stood up and noticed. And the Doctor stopped him - over and over again.

No more. The Daleks and the Time Lords were now depending on the power of the Eye of Harmony. Nearly all of their fleet.

His jury-rigged device tripped the lock of the granite monolith that contained the black hole's nucleus, which rose cleanly out of the Panopticon's floor. The Master revealed his other device - a field modulation controller. With a deft flourish, he altered the field settings to allow a massive output of energy from the Eye. More energy than any ship could conceivably withstand.

The TARDIS started to shake and quiver, the Time Rotor starting to wheeze like a grampus. the Doctor flicked switches, opened channels - activated every device on the time machine that required any conceivable form of power.

The TARDIS was beginning to overload. The Doctor wiped away the sweat that had gathered on his brow and thought. Temporal Energy is Time concentrated. He had a surplus of Time Energy. He must dispose of the surplus safely.

Create a parallel universe? Not enough time, and too fiddly by half. Extend a day for over a week? He remembered he did that on Christmas Eve during his second incarnation - now that was a botch up.

Then it struck him. The Doctor opened a dimensional portal, and re-routed the excess energy through that. The massive gouts of Chronotronic Energy flew into the Time Vortex - to dissipate harmlessly. With that done, the Doctor contacted the Time Lords via the Tachyon Net.

The Master shook his device irritably. It should be demonstrating the massive destruction of both the Dalek and Time Lord battle fleets. Instead, it showed that both fleets had routed the Chelonians and

were travelling to Gallifrey.

Irritation turned to worry as the Master examined the reading on the machine that was warping the containment fields on the Eye. His reptilian gaze widened in shock as he realised what exactly had happened.

His remaining Chelonian body guards were puzzled as he briskly walked towards the exit to the Panopticon - but not for long as several angry Daleks transmatted in front of them and blew them away.

The Master had hoisted up his robes and was actively running to the safety of his TARDIS. A Chancellery guard materialised in front of him - only to be swatted aside by somebody with superior strength and agility. After all, the Master was a Time Lord.

Two of the Chancellery guard were standing guard in front of his TARDIS - only to be savagely smashed aside by a black and red hurricane.

The Master quickly scurried to the console, chest heaving. He had to escape, to prove what he was. No Time Lord, no bureaucrat, would trap him!

He quickly stepped inside, and started to set the co-ordinates, both hearts hammering away. The Time Lords now had a temporal fix on his arton energy signature - although it could be re-calibrated in order to avoid detection, he had no time - his only hope was to go far enough into the future so that he couldn't be pursued, and try to regain his losses.

The Master's reptilian gaze fell upon a chest popped in the corner of the control room - and a germ of an idea formed in his head. He quickly activated the dematerialisation sequence, and crossed to the chest. Quickly opening it, he took out several pieces of equipment - a canister full of nanites and a gene sequencing programmer, little souvenirs from the Tzuns. He started tapping in the requirements he wanted - his own genome was pre-programmed into these nanites, making the task easier. Scrolling through a Tzun research file on the type of genetic changes he wanted, he examined his work.

Yes, this idea would work - provided he could find a host body within six hours after activation of the nanites. The Master grinned - the scheme he had just cooked up would guarantee the possibility of a host in close proximity. And he knew just the person.

He transferred the nanites held in a saline colloidal suspension into a viscous looking hypodermic gun, and quickly stabbed the large needle into his chest, directly into the subclavian artery that kept both hearts fed with vital oxygen, stabbing the activation trigger. He quickly pulled the needle out, and crossed to the control console, discarding the device. He set an evasive pattern, and rammed through the Time Vortex like a hyperspatial rocket.

Even if they did catch him - he still would survive.

The Doctor listened to the Castellan, who's hologramatic image was projecting appropriate concern.

"We've eliminated the aliens that he's employed, but he's escaped. Do

you know where he might..."

The Doctor began to program the console. "He'll be heading into the future - gaining some breathing space while he re-calibrates his arton energy signature into a new reading. Use the Power Ships to head as far as possible in front of the Master and triangulate his signal."

The Castellán's image faded as he implemented the Doctor's advice. He sniffed - not even a thank you.

The massive Power Ship, in service since the day's of Rassilon's bowships, materialised in the Time Vortex, and shunted through the billenia like a Morris Minor with a jet engine. It quickly traced the Master's TARDIS with the added input from Gallifrey, and materialised around his craft in realspace.

Suddenly - he had surrendered without a fight. The Guards quickly hustled him into the cells, and then proceeded to Skaro - with the record of the Master escaping from Time Lord prisons, it was deemed to be safer to take the renegade someplace secure.

The Doctor watched the Master's trial on hologramatic display in the TARDIS. The Time Lords had strictly stipulated in the military treaty that any and all prisoners in this campaign - even those who were blatantly guilty - would be afforded a full and fair trial. The Master seemed to be perfectly impassive as the Dalek and the Time Lord Cardinal Kelmex, of the Patrexes Chapter, led the prosecution, reeling off the three hundred thousand charges of murder - Time Lord and Dalek casualties in the Skaro barricade, three charges of assault and battery, and one of unlawful imprisonment. The Master had elected to represent himself in this matter.

The Doctor was worried - he opened a Tachyon Net line to The Castellán, quizzing him about the security measures. Apart from the fact a stray particle couldn't get into the 'courtroom' - a reconverted interrogation centre - the Minister of Gallifreyian Security confessed to being slightly unnerved due to the fact that the Master was facing vaporisation, and hardly turning a hair.

The Doctor turned off the scanner, tried to do something else - he placed a careful selection of jelly babies on an elegant crystal bowl, made sure that no stray black ones got into the display. He got a edition of The Time Machine out from the library - personally signed by Herbert himself. Drank three cups of tea - but still couldn't listen to his records.

He switched on the hologramatic display of the trial again. Apparently, the panel of twenty Senior Time Lords and twenty Black Daleks had come to an overwhelming conclusion of 'guilty', because the Master was already locked into the makeshift dematerialisator - salvaged from an old Transmat unit, the Doctor noted - his body below the neck secured, his head encased in a thick black helmet.

The most senior Time Lord stood up, old at eleven thousand, four hundred and twelve and in his penultimate body - this was his last case.

"Before we pass judgement on the Renegade who has called himself 'The Master', we understand he has a final request?"

The Master nodded, somewhat awkwardly in his helmet. "I request that The Doctor would take my mortal remains back to Gallifrey for transference into The Matrix - if not that, at least for burial."

The Time Lord quickly conferred with three other Time Lords and the most senior Dalek. Then he turned back. "Your request is granted. If that is all you wish to say..."

".... that is all, my Lord Chancellor."

"...Then we shall proceed with the judgement of the court."

Several Daleks glided into view of the hologramatic display from the entrance of the 'courtroom'. They aimed their gunsticks at a power-receptor wired into the dematerialisator, and fired. The combined infusion of superheated plasma energised the machine, which in less than three-hundredths of a second, dismantled the Master's molecular system. His body - and that of the machine which reduced him to less than gas - seemed to crystallise for an instant, then was reduced to a fine grey dust.

The Doctor shook his head. He take The Master's remains for Matrix Absorption? As if the Master stood a chance of being encoded...still, there might be an eager psychology student who would love to explore a devious Renegade mind - and the court was recognised and empowered by the High Council. The wishes of the defendant were granted, and had to be carried out. The Doctor crossed briskly to the console, and started to set the co-ordinates.

The Master's remains were placed in a small metal sphere. Then, the nanites activated, on the criteria that the main body had critically malfunctioned, and there was complete darkness. The matter of the dematerialisator which was equally destroyed was re-processed into a simple, gelatinous organic substance. The remains of the Master were re-encoded with the RNA memory sequences up to and including the point of total body death. The new form that The Master had created was reptilian in nature, a side-effect of the DNA he had to assimilate when humanoid in order to keep his thirteenth incarnation from decaying. Still - the new gene sequences were psychokinetic chomosomes - meaning The Master now had an extra chance of assimilating a new body - hopefully The Doctor's. It would be a fitting revenge, to wear the body of his most persistent enemy like a new coat.

The Doctor landed in the 'courtroom', and the Senior Time Lord gave him a small brass sphere. It was heavier than the Doctor expected, and he had to juggle it around for a moment while he got his bearings.

"So - this will be the end of the alliance?"

The Time Lord shook his head. "Gallifrey has shown itself very vulnerable to physical attack. A permanent non-aggression treaty is being formulated while a formal military/trade agreement is being reached." The Time Lord gave the Doctor a pointed look. "So that means no interfering with the Daleks until the treaties are being finalised."

The Doctor snarled. "Bureaucratic venal snakes and warmongering blobs in polycarbide armour. It's a match made in the heavens."

The Time Lord shook his head. "Out of your hands now, Doctor. Just take the remains of the Master to the Site of Final Incarnations on Gallifrey, and you can go back to your petty, pointless wandering."

The Doctor opened the TARDIS with one hand while holding the sphere in the other. "I'm glad that this whole affair is over, that's all."

No, Doctor.

It's not quite over yet.

Securing the sphere, and setting the co-ordinates. Sitting down and listening to his records.

Then - a critical malfunction. The intricate timing mechanism of the TARDIS, essential for any time machine, was destroyed. Setting the co-ordinates - and manually calculating the temporal differential - for San Fransisco, 1999, December 30th, when the prototype beryllium atomic clock was being unveiled. The CPU of that device was the closest compatible component within the currently crippled range of the TARDIS.

Discovering the slime trail from his broken graduation chest to the console and working out what the Master had become. Evacuating the TARDIS without checking the scanner in his hurry to avoid the creature which carried the Master's gene sequences and memories. Paying for that lack of caution by semi-automatic fire.

Watching the creature escape via the keyhole - the Chinese boy not noticing, putting himself in danger.

Blackness.

"..sign, or we can't do nuthin'....."

The Doctor wakes briefly. An ambulance. A man - a paramedic - who looks very familiar. The Doctor's realisation of what this man will become. His sympathies go out to the soon-to-be vessel just before blackness reclaims him.

Awareness. Puccini's work, the strains of Madame Butterfly wafting in the air. The Doctor almost smiles, what better than Puccini to wake up to?

Then - his eyes snap open. His vision intensifies, absorbing all the available light, for maximum vision. He sees a woman in a operating theatre gown holding a scalpel and surgical micro-probe.

Sudden realisation, and stabbing fear. He grabs her hand and tries to entreat her to stop.

"...I'm not human...."

The Doctor tried valiantly. His body had been injured by three bullets, and he was being gassed. He knew that if the surgeon

inserted the probe into his oxygen-supplying subclavian artery, instead of the brachioscapular vein where it would be located within human anatomy, he would suffer a dual heart attack that would kill this incarnation. And, quite possibly, inflict Total Death, since destroying both hearts was the second best way to kill a Time Lord outside vapourisation.

He tried entreating the strangely familiar surgeon - hadn't she seen his x-rays? Convinced the doctors at Ashbridge Cottage Hospital not to go blundering around in unfamiliar territory. The Doctor blacked out.

His hyper-efficient metabolism shifted into over-drive, processing the anethesia. He quickly woke up. Shouting something about the Master. Strong, confident hands pushing him gently, but firmly down.

Then, it all made sense to him. This was what he - The Ka Faraq Gatri - deserved.. The genocide of Skaro and the Seven Planets. Hurting Ace over and over again, because of the Greater Good, the old standby of all tyrants. Taking lives to try and save others. Being unable to justify it to Professor Pryce.

This ignoble unglorious death was exactly what he deserved. It would destroy this body, this rigidly calculating persona, and hopefully replace it with an incarnation that would simply be content to deal with more immediate problems.

And if Total Death occurred - perhaps that was what he deserved.

The Doctor welcomed his death, with melancholic resignation.

Later.....

"WHO AM I?!?"

End
file.